



Revolutions from above: Worker training as *trasformismo* in South Korea*

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While making very substantial changes to the population's working conditions, government strategies to foster economic development in South Korea have historically attempted to keep worker involvement, in terms of influence on the process, to a bare minimum. Applying the Gramscian concept of passive revolution, this article analyses governance mechanisms and production relations over a history of authoritarianism and up to the contemporary period of democratic reform. *Trasformismo*, which is a strategy of limited concessions, has been provided via vocational training for workers. Despite this attempt at inclusion, it is concluded that workers have not enjoyed full participation in negotiation for their welfare at any time in Korean history.

This article analyses a manifestation of social change in the once heralded Asian Tiger, South Korea (hereafter shortened to 'Korea'), and the mode of governance surrounding vocational education training (VET) strategies and other strategies of *trasformismo* (transformism) that aim to facilitate economic development and worker convergence with international standards. Workers are the fuel and fire of economic development and the backbone of any production system; they are vitally affected by global political economics but, paradoxically, are the most under-researched group in International Political Economics (IPE) (O'Brien, 2000: 89-99). With that in mind, this article presents a case study of Korean workers' experience of being 'trained' to adapt to hegemonic capitalist norms over several decades of state-led, Western-guided economic development in South Korea.



The notion of convergence, or the ‘ability’ of nations to replicate industrialised countries’ development trajectories, was both implicitly and explicitly a part of IMF restructuring schemes such as those applied to South Korea in 1998 and onwards. Advanced industrial countries compose the core membership of the ‘convergence club’ (Magariños, 2001), and benchmarking of ‘best practices’ for the creation of national wealth emanates from this base. Observers have noted a number of possible reasons for the failure of convergence strategies, many of which correspond to the discrepancies discussed by Rowley and Bae (2002). These include factors such as the mismatch of particular cultural value systems.¹ But as Paul Cammack has pointed out, experts at the World Bank believe they hold the solution to lagging nations’ seeming inability to catch up with developed countries.

Cammack (2002a)² discusses the World Bank’s intent to construct a Global Architecture of Governance (GAG), which is a metaphorical ‘architecture’ designed to guide convergence in a way that the Bank perceives to be the most effective. In 1999, World Bank President James D. Wolfensohn composed a comprehensive development framework (CDF) that provides a list of actions designed to aid developing countries to achieve ‘structural and social aspects of development’ (1999: 3; see Figure 1).

The framework recommends development within particular categories: structural, human and physical; and a wider category of ‘specific strategies’ that includes rural, urban, private sector and special national considerations. Wolfensohn believes that the World Bank and IMF are responsible for overseeing and providing surveillance for all nations’ development, and that these institutions are in possession of a form of superlative knowledge supporting the best possible methods of national economic development. The GAG involves IMF intervention and the pastoral role that this UN, specialised agency has played in stories of restructuring across the globe. It advocates benchmarking, or the ‘system of continuous improvements derived from systematic comparisons with world best practice’ (Sklair, 2001a: 115).

The contradiction of the World Bank’s disciplinary mandates within the GAG lies in its prescriptions for completion. A nation is expected to follow the guidelines of the CDF, but it must also take ownership of development



(Cammack, 2002a: 41). Nations are expected to accept and digest the World Bank's decisions for the best practices of development, and to 'own' and to take charge of the implementation process of these practices. Without 'ownership', nations are predicted to remain less successful in restructuring. But how can a nation own a process of development that is so entrenched in the restrictive, ideological expectations defined by the World Bank, and by the global forces of speculators who demand evidence of 'best practices' and actively encourage a 'comprehensive development framework'?

Figure 1. The Comprehensive Development Framework

A. Structural

1. Good and clean government
2. An effective legal and justice system
3. A well-organised and supervised financial system
4. A social safety net and social programs

B. Human

5. Education and knowledge institutions
6. Health and population issues

C. Physical

7. Water and Sewage
8. Energy
9. Roads, transportation and telecommunications
10. Sustainable development, environmental and cultural issues

D. Specific strategies-rural, urban, and private sector

11. Rural strategy
12. Urban strategy
13. Private sector strategy
14. Special national consideration

James D. Wolfensohn, 'A Proposal for a Comprehensive Development Framework', 21 January 1999.

This article looks at how South Korea claimed 'ownership', and mastered a particular process of knowledge production surrounding economic development and crisis-restructuring through the incorporation of VET, which is calculated to



incorporate workers into a hegemony of development ideologies. Operationalising the Gramscian concept 'passive revolution', which exists in a case of unsuccessful hegemony, I look at the mode of governance under which these events have occurred.

I conclude that the conditions of government leadership surrounding training historically reflect those of a passive revolution, and are similar to those evident during the more contemporary period of crisis restructuring. This has occurred despite democratisation, but in most cases, the Korean government-led process of knowledge production is a response to the international forces and pressures involved in the construction of an architecture of governance.

Korean educators have acquired the characteristics, parameters and methods for accomplishing the right type of 'development', as defined by the World Bank from a distinguishable source. Adrian Leftwich stresses that it is 'Western "knowledge" about development, which defines what it is and how it happens, and what should be done and by whom and to whom and with what objectives in mind' (2000: 64).

A population's consciousness of its own *underdevelopment* is managed by Western political and economic power, and is disseminated by government agencies and international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. The universalising of this knowledge is the final point of Gramscian hegemony. Gills emphasises that an integral hegemonic mode of accumulation requires not only an international division of labour, and a legitimate political order, but also 'an ideology which conditions historical consciousness to allow accumulation, and social order, to occur in that specific historical form' (1993: 189). Augelli and Murphy note that 'ideologies are always instruments of power, because it is only with a merging of thought and action that the historical role of humanity ... can be regained' (1988: 21).

The analysis here aims to inform a case study that demonstrates how the transformation and adaptation to ideologies of global capitalism, according to the principles put forward in the GAG, have been 'owned' by the semi-peripheral state South Korea in molecular stages through a government-led project toward ideological adaptation. Groups that seek hegemonic leadership build a common, consensual worldview among various social classes and forces

(Bieler, 2001: 98), and present this worldview to subordinate groups as beneficial and necessary, and worth ‘owning’ nationally.

Education is an obvious institution with which to enforce a potentially dominant worldview, wherein elite groups use ‘the tools of the war of position, the various ideological apparatuses ... to pre-empt the creation of an hegemony by the working class’ (Showstack Sassoon, 1987: 210).

This article outlines the Korean state’s accumulation strategies over time in relation to a series of attempted hegemonic projects. Findings appear to support a proposed historical continuity of the conditions for passive revolution. These events are traced over a historical period stretching from authoritarian developmentalism in 1948-1979, to the economic crisis of 1997 that resulted in a cacophony of recovery and reform. Along this historical timeline, I discuss government-regulated and -led VET because it is indicative of governments’ efforts to force accumulation strategies forward.

The argument is divided into four sections. I first discuss the Gramscian concepts of passive revolution and *trasformismo*, in order to substantiate later claims emerging from empirical research of Korean VET⁴ and other forms of social co-optation. The second section outlines the molecular changes of capitalism within the Korean economy that have occurred under three dictatorship regimes, from 1948 to the period of democratisation in the 1980s.

Over time, international pressures to globalise and to improve development and ‘best practices’ became increasingly pervasive, and this is noted throughout the historical periods in question. In the third section, I ask whether passive revolution has “‘present” significance’ (Gramsci, *PN [Prison Notebooks]*: 118), even after democratisation, leading into the late-1990s when the Asian economic crisis paved the way for IMF-guided restructuring. The section focuses on the *trasformismo* of restructured VET strategies, and highlights conditions of governance within which these have been affected.

The fourth section contains some final comments on the links between the theoretical analyses and empirical findings. I conclude that Korean economic development is continuing in the non-hegemonic environment of passive revolution, and thus that it opens up possibilities for worker dissent and contestation to emerge.



1. Conditions for passive revolution

A case of passive revolution can be noted when a government's accumulation strategies are elite-engineered, and do not succeed in garnering hegemonic consensus or the formation of a hegemonic historical bloc⁵ from the wider society. It is a 'revolution without a revolution' (Adamson, 1980: 186), and a type of 'socio-economic modernisation [occurring] so that changes in production relations are accommodated within existing social and institutional forms but without fundamentally challenging the established political order' (Morton, 2003: 632). The theory demonstrates restructuring in such a way that it does not challenge capitalist social relations, but alternatively does not achieve the social status of what could be compared with Taoist artistic spontaneity. The leading class, in order to resist the ascendance of the subordinate classes' potential gain of hegemony, enacts passive revolution and uses *trasformismo* strategies to rein in citizens' support for the 'revolution', in what is ultimately an elite project of change (Showstack Sassoon, 1987: 210).

Van der Pijl (1993) discusses the elite-guided historical formation and transformations of socialist Russia, and succinctly refers to formations of class that have occurred in what Gramsci calls 'successive waves' (PN: 114) within the conditions of passive revolution. Van der Pijl quotes Gramsci: 'passive revolution combines the notions of (a) a 'revolution from above' without massive participation ... and (b) a creeping, 'molecular' social transformation in which the progressive class finds itself compelled to advance in a more or less surreptitious, compromised fashion' (PN: 108, quoted in Van der Pijl, 1993: 239). Van der Pijl's case study notes molecular changes within Russia, i.e. the 'organic social compromise' (1993: 244) that occurs under the conditions of passive revolution. Below, I observe the way in which capitalism has been reformulated throughout Korean history, under a series of regime changes and their corresponding accumulation strategies and hegemonic projects. Molecular changes to Korean VET programmes correspond with elite groups' interest in hegemonic control, through the articulation of skills norms to workers.

For the purposes of this article, I have noted two of the conditions under which passive revolution has occurred in South Korea. The first condition is simply the lack of



consensus in society regarding development strategies. The nature of 'passivity' within passive revolutions 'refers to the way challenges may be thwarted so that changes in production relations are accommodated within the current social formation' (Morton, 2003: 634). So societies' passivity is not 'passive' in the most commonly understood sense, but indicates a state's ability to initiate a form of revolution or change that occurs either by intervention, or by gradual re-incorporation of 'new social groups' (2003: 634-5) into what remains a dominant discourse. In this sense, the government maintains leadership *without* widespread consent for its own revolutionary strategies. The state-led 'revolution' is represented by an accumulation strategy, i.e. export-led developmentalism, or neoliberalism.

The second category of 'conditions' focuses on states' hegemonic projects and *trasformismo*. Morton emphasises that 'hegemonic projects are typically oriented to broader issues grounded not only in the economy but the whole sphere of state-civil society relations' (Morton, 2003: 636). Hegemonic projects are elite-organised and -run passive revolutions that are designed and propagated in progressive terms. For this piece, I discuss VET programmes in the realm of hegemonic projects, because workers' abilities are a very important part of state-led accumulation strategies. A government that is capable of convincing its population of the merits of state-envisioned political and corporate strategies increases its chances of consolidating hegemony, owing to its efforts to involve the nation via the coaxing efforts of *trasformismo*. Passive revolution is the reassertion of the dominant class's rhetoric, and 'the establishment of a new State, or a political superstructure generally suited to the eventual dominance of the capitalist mode of production' (Showstack Sassoon, 1987: 210).

The state, alongside various consultants, often designs a locally placed economic framework for the norms of production that creates a set of rules for social relations of production. There are particular requirements and expectations for this dominant mode of social relations of production: in the process of *trasformismo*, all other modes are inferior and discredited. *Trasformismo* describes the absorption of potentially opposing forces that may disrupt passive revolution, involving the incorporation of cultural, social, economic, and political leaders into the networks of the elite; but by definition, it does not involve consensus across society.



The interests of a dominant class are enforced through the re-articulation of another group's 'needs', via reformist rhetoric that counteracts revolutionary stances. The process of adoption of standardised norms of production occurs via the elite's articulation and enactment of the strategy of *trasformismo*. Cox writes that 'social conflict is not eliminated (it never could be) but it is institutionalised and regulated' (Cox, 1989/1996: 246); and this is executed in the context of *trasformismo*.

Gramsci noted the signs of *trasformismo* in Italian politics with Giolitti's⁶ co-optation of workers into its political economic strategy. Giolitti aimed to create an 'urban bloc' of workers and industrialists, and applied both sanctioning and favour-granting measures to this effect (*PN*: 94). The dominant class, in this case, had succeeded in prescribing a social order that was forcibly implemented and thus did not succeed in acquiring hegemonic status. Thus the conditions of passive revolution are seen by the reassertion of the dominant class's rhetoric into terms that are palatable for the masses; but are not necessarily consensual or beneficial to subordinate groups. This has several implications, including a lack of organic intellectual support for accumulation strategies, and also involves the introduction of externally conceived ideas about development that provide some extent of legitimacy to the activity of a 'globalising' state.

Cox writes that Gramsci distinguished between 'two kinds of societies' in relation to passive revolution. The first type of society is a post-developed nation that has 'undergone a thorough social revolution and worked out fully its consequences in new modes of production and social relations'. The second type is a society like Korea: one that has 'thrust upon them aspects of a new order created abroad, without the old order having been replaced'. This latter type of society is thus caught in a 'revolution-restoration', within the limitations of passive revolution: 'neither the old forces nor the new forces could triumph', indicating a lack of hegemony (Cox, 1983: 165-166). In this sense, passive revolution involves the introduction of external ideas and externally designed social relations of production.

The next sections break down three historical periods within Korea's modern history that include phases of 'developmentalism', 'authoritarian/state corporatism', and 'neoliberalism', and analyse the extent to which structural



transformation in Korea demonstrates passive revolution. In order to identify passive revolution within each period, the two categories of conditions discussed above are unravelled in the analysis of VET programmes and other struggles between social forces, throughout Korean history.

2. The history of vocational education training under conditions of passive revolution

This section covers the history of developmentalism through to the 1980s, placing governance and *trasformismo* in the context of changing accumulation strategies and hegemonic projects. Within each historical period, I outline how events may reflect the two categories of conditions for passive revolution: elite-engineered development, and the accompanying strategies of *trasformismo*.

After liberation from Japan, from 1948-1979 the Republic of Korea industrialised rapidly under the two consecutive military bureaucratic presidents Syngman Rhee and Park Chung-hee, who facilitated and directed Korea's economic development and modernisation under regimes of developmental paternalism (Deyo, 1989: 103-105). 'Developmental paternalism' is based on the idea that governments have a moral responsibility to the public, and both presidents placed an emphasis on hard work and sacrifice for national prosperity. Both governments appealed to post-war nationalism, which reduces the risk of political dissent and may unite opposing forces. This is a form of *trasformismo*, because it aids in 'revolution-restoration'; and it is similar to what Gramsci noted in the formation of the Italian State, as parties became closely aligned due to molecular changes of ideologies (Gramsci, *Risorgimento*: 157; in *PN*: 58).

The first president of the Republic of Korea relied on UN assistance and US aid for reconstruction. During Rhee's term of presidency, the United States took over the Education Bureau and formed an Educational Council, demonstrating external influences in the development process: 'beautiful imperialist[s]' had finally reached Korea (Shambaugh, 1991)—beautiful, anti-communist imperialists (Hong, 1983: 226). Pro-modernisation critics welcomed the 'beautiful' anti-communist imperialists from the US, whose rhetoric claimed to have rescued Korea from the Japanese and saved South

Korea from the communism of the North (Hong, 1985: 226), and us-led education reflected these convictions. 'Doing good for others' was the ideology behind the American-directed construction of the Republic of Korea (KRIVET, 1999: 114).

Education institutions promoted the ideological slogans 'doing it for yourself', and 'working industriously' (p. 114). A single-form system of education was introduced at this time, which was intended to provide an alternative to the Japanese totalitarian system. In the single-form system, vocationally trained students and students from the humanities in the formal education system were not meant to be differentiated between socially.

In reality, vocationally trained individuals were not attributed the same level of social esteem as those educated in a formal institution (p. 115). Later, during Park's era of leadership, within every vocational school and training centre the phrase 'skilled workers are the standard bearer of the modernisation of our country' (p. 117) was posted for trainees to read.

President Park envisioned four five-year economic development plans, in order to facilitate his accumulation strategy of export-led industrialisation. Park's first five-year plan encouraged 'guided capitalism' (Clifford, 1998: 49). The plan actually stated that 'Throughout the plan period, the economic system will be a form of "guided capitalism"... in which the government will either directly participate in or indirectly render guidance to the basic industries and other important fields' (p. 49).

The government maintained a leadership role in its accumulation strategy. In terms of the expectations placed on workers, Park's economic system required 'brutally long working hours, high rates of savings and investment, and a hierarchical, authoritarian system that rewarded those who succeeded and punished those who did not co-operate' (Clifford, 1998: 45). In a dramatic speech, Park encouraged workers to take on the strenuous responsibility of fighting for a historic goal: 'We must work. One cannot survive with clean hands ... smooth hands are our enemy' (p. 47). This is an interesting mixture of elite-led development and the appeal to human sentiment—the latter of which is characteristic of *trasformismo*.

During Park's first plan (1962-1966), more than 80 per cent of exports were of forestry and fishery products, agricultural products, and raw ores (Clifford, 1998: 54).



There was a shortage of appropriately skilled workers, which led to the promotion of a plan to train 8,000 workers—a number that quickly expanded to 9,000. Then it was announced that 10,000 individuals would receive training over an eighteen-month period month (KRIVET, 1999: 119), according to government mandates. In 1964, a vocational training bill was passed by the Ministry of Labour (MOL), and it stressed the following points:

... the securing of labour power (skill, talent) in terms of quality and quantity is the one and only economic policy ... the authorisation and management of the results of vocational training by the state is appropriate in terms of skill management and will aid in the improvement of worker awareness ... the objective is to plan job improvement at the same time as economic development through the nurturing of skilled workers necessary for industry and other businesses by integrating the former job stability law and the skill acquisition system of a workers' standard law. (KRIVET, 1999: 120)

These guidelines indicate the government's direct leadership over the accumulation of industrial and manufacturing labour power. Amsden states:

The wheeling and dealing, horsetrading, and trafficking that characterised this process were reminiscent of the reciprocity that characterised relations between the state and the privileged classes under dynastic rule ... the state used its power to discipline not just workers but the owners and managers of capital as well. (Amsden 1989: 63, 64)

In 1967, at the beginning of Park's second economic plan (1967-1971), the face of vocational training changed when the government installed a publicly-funded Central Vocational Training Centre, with financial and supervisory aid from the UNDP and the ILO. This change was the beginning of the government's project to internationalise worker VET programmes and, within the conditions of passive revolution, was complimentary to, and not transformative of, its overall political and economic development strategies. A license-training process was implemented at this time, and businesses gradually phased out in-plant training programmes (KRIVET, 1999: 127).

Without worker consent, the government carefully guided the next two development plans (1972-1976; 1977-1981), and workers were expected to comply with each transition. Overall, during Park's five-year economic plans, the system of vocational training was marked by 'confusion' (Amsden, 1989: 223). The government tried different strategies to accommodate the accumulation strategy inherent to its 'plans', but without hegemonic consensus from all social forces, confusion was inevitable. This confusion was a feature in the question of which academic institution should provide training (high schools or junior colleges), and also in the question of whether the public or private sector should finance its provision. The confusion was partially resolved by an amendment to the Vocational Training Law in 1975, which required firms with more than 300 workers to provide in-plant training. However, no checking mechanism was instituted, and this law was deemed ineffective.

By 1976, 125,000 craftspeople had passed the final exams at vocational training centres provided by one automobile business group. Amsden claims that the training was not comprehensive (1989: 224). Hyundai Construction was one of the first companies to reach out across the ocean in contracting. The company was 'forced to upgrade the quality of their construction work, as required by u.s. federal regulations concerning subcontractors' (232). Then, in 1977—the first year of Park's fourth plan—there was an increase in foreign agreements for technology transfers. The government was gradually beginning to open its doors to foreign involvement, and external advances into the market became increasingly evident.

The Kwangju Massacre in 1980 was a mark of the social chaos of the time; and in 1979, President Park had been assassinated. A new form of opposition movement, *Uijang* (the students' movement), was simmering. Students left university in their thousands and took jobs in factories with the intention of helping to organise uneducated workers (Ogle, 1990: 99). Radical students became the core of the labour movement in the 1980s. Korean unionisation was highest in the craft industry and among production workers in manufacturing positions (Deyo, 1989: 77) but, finally, in 1985 the first skilled workers' strike occurred in the Daewoo automobile production plant (Cumings, 1998: 381). The strike was immense, and riot police fought brutally with demonstrators.



Even after his death, Park's fifth development plan continued, but it ended in 1981 as martial law was handed to Chun, and Korea experienced six more years of similar, dictatorial leadership. In the spring of that year, Korean police tortured a student to death, triggering widespread protests. On 13 April 1987, President Chun told the nation that the government would not revise the constitution, despite there having been several meetings to discuss it, and that his own government would handpick his successor from the existing Electoral College system. Chun chose Roh Tae-woo as the presidential candidate—a man who had been in close cooperation with Chun in the clashes against civilians during the Kwangju incident. The 13 April speech caused a significant amount of both governmental and social dissatisfaction, and caused a split in the opposition New Korea Democratic Party. Both Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung, both of whom would become presidents in later years, abandoned the party and created the Party for Peace and Democracy (PPD: *Pyeonghwa Minjudang*; Okonogi, 1988).

The reorganisation of the parties at this time is an indication of *trasformismo*, because there was no authentic break-off from the dominant party but merely the formation of another ideologically similar party. Passive revolution indicates 'the constant reorganisation of state power and its relationship to society to preserve control by the few over the many, and maintain a traditional lack of real control by the mass of the population over the political and economic realms' (Showstack Sassoon, 1982: 129). The reorganisation of parties indicates this molecular shift.

While previously, students and low-skilled workers had predominantly been involved in resistance activity, after 13 April 1987 the movement changed in that journalists, university professors, religious leaders and skilled workers joined in protest. Okonogi states that 'within Korean society, where religious feelings run deep and intellectuals are highly respected, these actions had a great impact' (1988: 26). For the first time, middle-class citizens and skilled workers joined activists in protest, rioting against the government. In the crisis of unrest, the government finally conceded, and agreed to reconsider a constitutional revision and more 'democratic' policies. Widespread unrest at this time shows the inability of the government to gain hegemony; the government responded by making molecular changes to its rhetoric via *trasformismo*. However, this is not the end of the story.

The introduction of a more ‘democratically’-run Korea was not a smooth process, due to the nature of Korea’s history of authoritarian development. Kim and Moon (2000: 54) attribute Korean economic development to an intervention of geopolitics, a market-moulding state, aggressive export promotion and formation of human capital, and Confucian culture. Inherent in those factors are several contradictions to democracy. While democratisation changed the Korean political and economic climate to some degree, it did not directly follow that Korea could claim to be a successful case of integrated and hegemonic democratisation. Gramsci makes the following comment regarding hegemonic democracies:

In the hegemonic system, there exists democracy “between” the leading group and the groups which are being “led”, in so far as the development of the economy and thus the legislation which expresses such development favour the (molecular) passage from the “led” groups to the “leading” group. (NM: 160, in PN: 56)

This comment is consistent with Gramsci’s understanding of consent as a factor of integral hegemony.

Despite formal democratisation, hegemony was still not evident; but from 1987-89, trade unions multiplied and labour disputes increased. At first, the Roh government relaxed its former intervention tactics, and business-level negotiation—or the attempt at such—between management and workers became more common. Then, between 1990 and 1992, at a time of economic downturn, the government resumed an anti-union stance and union membership began to decline. Employers appreciated the government’s stance in this regard as they attempted to implement ‘new business strategies’, including flexible wage systems based on performance evaluations, requiring certain skills that became increasingly prevalent in VET programmes. The strategies were a foreshadowing of the restructuring programmes that would be led by the IMF and a host of MNC managers a few years later.

Following democratisation, labour, management and the government had conflicting objectives. Workers wanted to see democracy in the workplace through bargaining power and work stability, but management prioritised flexible market conditions. Kim Young-sam, the first civilian president of



South Korea, began his term in 1993 and was immediately faced with these conflicts. The conditions for democracy ideally include widespread opportunities for the voice of the people to be heard, including that of workers. At this time, Korean workers sought the removal of bans to multiple unionism, and the ban on third-party intervention in cases of labour/management struggles. The government most often sided with management, however, with the goal of creating flexible labour market conditions (Kim & Moon, 2000: 57). Unions' political activity, furthermore, was not allowed. Simultaneous with democratisation, the Kim government pursued a heavily-loaded *seggyehwa* (globali-sation) campaign. Once again, external forces were at work in the accumulation strategies of this president's era.

In November 1994, President Kim declared his vision for *seggyehwa* to 'lift the global role of the nation and make the life of future generations better' (Korean Embassy, 1999). *Seggyehwa* was touted using a progressive tone: President Kim told senior officials who were suspicious of foreign intervention that *seggyehwa* was not the same thing as internationalisation, because economics would not be the focus. *Globalisation* would positively affect other facets of society: politics, diplomacy, education, athletics and other such non-economic factors (Bowbrow & Na, 1999: 183). President Kim told the international business realm, at a conference in 1996, that *seggyehwa* was a term that represented Korea's push to eliminate corruption and the 'wrongs of history', and that his aim was to focus on 'transparency, openness, a clean government, and a clean society' (Bowbrow & Na, 1999: 187). These progressive statements were part of a hegemony-seeking campaign. President Kim's plan was to achieve global neoliberal standards in South Korea. The us in particular encouraged Korea to open its markets fully, and to abandon regulation and protectionism. Kim hoped that *seggyehwa* could aid this process and bring the nation together, based on what he hoped would be a shared vision. Kang claims that:

Seggyehwa dealt with the external challenges ... in several ways. In response to market-opening measures targeting South Korea, *seggyehwa* as a rhetoric served to give some political cover to Kim Young Sam's government, which was unable to resist the United States' arm-twisting. *Seggyehwa* was used as a slogan enabling South Korea to

acquiesce to market openings as part of its larger globalization drive. That is, *segzehwa* was a useful, if uncertain, psychological tool that helped the nationalistic South Koreans accept a measure of reciprocity in international trade. (Kang, 2000: 85, 86)

Kim believed that his nation would be left behind in the rapidly liberalising world if it did not position itself to be competitive through deregulation. But before long, Kim's 'non-economic' *segzehwa* strategy claims were discredited when he actively sought membership of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Kim hurriedly passed deregulation measures; other measures intended to encourage Korean overseas investment were outlined in the Five-Year New Economic Plan for 1993-7, and in the Long-Term Economic Design for the Twenty-First Century. South Korea was accepted into the OECD in December 1996 (Kang, 2000: 86).

President Kim ran a form of state that Deyo calls authoritarian/state corporatism. This type of government 'invites symbolic or co-opted participation in limited decision-making, and in some sense, is at least nominally less exclusionary than simple exclusion' (Deyo, 1989: 108). Kim's hegemonic project rhetorically aimed to invite society to build democratic participation. Nonetheless, labour was excluded from decision-making during his presidency. In 1996, before the economic crisis tested the resilience of the Korean economy, eleven laws described as 'anti-labour' by the Militant were passed, which included provisions allowing employers to activate mass layoffs, and simplified procedures for hiring temporary, part-time and replacement workers. The Employers' Federation justified this by claiming that the new measures 'would be used only if firms were in extreme difficulties' (*Militant*, 1997): a strange foreshadowing, considering the actual 'difficulties' that would occur one year later. Alongside these assurances in 1996, the Federation offered to arrange 'development programmes that focus on vocational training. Neither union federation gave credence to the offer'. So job flexibility was paired with a new form of 'security', in the form of VET.

This sequence of consistent, observable characteristics within the historical periods discussed here points toward the adaptation of capitalism to historical circumstances. Conditions for passive revolution were in place: first, Korean



economic development occurred under state leadership of its initiated accumulation strategies, without hegemonic integration.

Second, elements of *trasformismo* or the progressive nature of VET and hegemonic projects, and external influences, have been evident within each historical period. But is there a ‘present significance’ of passive revolution? The next section addresses this question by looking closely at the restructuring period that followed the Asian economic crisis of 1997; a crisis that shook the nation, and led to further adaptations of capitalism. Furthermore, I seek out the conditions under which restructuring was applied, in order to note how Korean VET has reconfigured in the absence of hegemony.

3. The present significance of passive revolution

Within a year, the euphoria of gaining OECD membership waned when the effects of the Asian economic crisis⁷ took hold in Korea. Just as the crisis came to a head, in 1997, President Kim Dae-jung was elected. The crisis hit Korea worse than it did other nations across the region, and drastic measures were taken to reform the economy, to attract foreign capital and to try to avoid future crises. But crisis reform affected workers most directly and negatively, due to job cuts.⁸ If workers could not keep jobs in the insecure post-crisis situation, they were expected to join VET programmes that would make them ‘employable’. If workers were privileged enough to remain in employment, they were expected to attend developmental VET that would aid in their retention of ‘employability’. The government’s hegemonic project was intended to involve workers by providing the means for them to ‘help themselves’. Yet it corresponded directly with the labour power needed to accommodate the state’s emerging accumulation strategy of neoliberalism.

The main change to VET in the period following the economic crisis in Korea was that the state’s accumulation strategy became a blueprint of IMF leadership—a classic case of reform and restructuring aimed at meeting the standards of global neoliberalism. This process led to the increased involvement of external forces in VET development. Training programmes began to prompt new forms of consolidation and convergence that would dissolve cultural norms and practices, and ultimately fragment any terrain for resistance

to state-led and internationally-informed internationalisation strategies (Cox, 1987: 253). The progressive tone of *trasformismo* thus emphasised internationalisation initiatives and, as usual, excluded those less privileged by globalisation.⁹

In terms of *trasformismo* during neoliberalism, new forms of knowledge became commodified assets in the international environment and were translated into Korea's VET programmes, in order to train workers toward the global 'norms' of the time. Leadbeater believes that state guidance for this process has increased in importance due to 'its role in producing knowledge, through the education system' (1998: 379). The Kim government began to manage the unprecedented requirements for curriculum development and content via partnerships with international groups, which claim ownership of what is considered lucrative worker 'knowledge' in the contemporary context of neoliberal capitalism.

New expectations for workplace performance were placed on workers, who were put under pressure to remain or, alternatively, to become employable following the economic crisis. In order to maintain control and to sideline potential social crises or uprisings in opposition to development strategies, the government intended to absorb any fragments of society that posed a threat, by providing the means to obtain 'employable' knowledge through the much-lauded medium of VET programmes. The specific content of the knowledge expectations is discussed below.

Laid-off workers were opposed to forced training programmes because of unwillingness, or because of their suspicion of the limited short-term benefits of the schemes, which demonstrates the lack of consensus for these initiatives. Through framing the government-required training programmes as positive incentives for personal development (in a tone of *trasformismo*) and, in the post-crisis era, as a means to remain or to become 'employable' after the enormous amount of lay-offs, the government applied a 'strategy on the part of the dominant power to gradually co-opt elements of the opposition forces—a strategy known in Italian politics as *trasformismo*' (Cox, 1999: 25). '*Trasformismo* can serve as a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to the policies of the dominant coalition and can thereby obstruct the formation of class-based organised opposition' (Cox, 1983: 166-7).



The Korean government sidelined potentially dissident groups by providing a social safety net of VET programmes, in order to appease laid-off workers who were most likely to oppose elite-led accumulation strategies. In this way, the government can be said to have enacted the strategy of *trasformismo* in the crisis-reform era.

On 9 February 1996, the establishment of the unprecedented Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET) had been proposed as a part of the Educational Reform for the Construction of a New Vocational Education System. By 27 March of the next year, the KRIVET Act (Act no. 5315) came into effect. The Institute was then founded on 10 September 1997 as a government-funded institution, just as the economic crisis erupted across Asia. Since 1997, KRIVET has controlled vocational education and human resources, and composed curricula that complimented the government's reform and recovery strategies.

In response to the crisis, and in response to the multinational corporations that entered the economy rapidly in response to deregulation requirements, the government took over all areas of VET in partnership with UNESCO. The government worked specifically with the ILO and UNESCO's International Project on Technical and Vocational Education (UNEVOC) to establish government-led, reform-oriented VET programmes, and general vocational training within businesses was completely abolished in 1998.

Workers were thus expected, from 1997 onwards, to fulfil government objectives for production and skill acquisition.¹⁰ The top-down nature of recommendations for skills acquisition indicates that workers' participation in development was, once again, elite-engineered during the reform period.

The Presidential Commission for Educational Reform designed the Second Education Reform Programme that involved VET reform, the main change being the introduction of the 'Lifelong Vocational Education System' (KOILAF, 1999c: 108). The 'new labour culture' (KOILAF, 2001: 11; Lee, 1999: 1) was a campaign instigated by ministers of Labour in 1997, which enjoyed continued propagation into the next century.

The campaign introduced new work-training programmes involving classes, videos and literature designed to prepare companies for foreign management and/or new policies. The main thrust was to implement a change in perspective: ...

[a] total shift in perspective among workers and businesses, and the government, will be necessary for Korea to compete in the new century, where national borders have lost their significance. Korea must observe a new paradigm of labour relations in which employers and workers are partners in every sense of the word. (Minister Lee Sang-ryong, 1999)

For employers and workers to be 'partners' they would need to identify common ground on several counts; but the failed attempts at conclusive dialogue within two Tripartite Commissions indicates that this partnership has not been established. Instead, the Ministry of Labour (MOL) pursued international partnerships intended not simply to guide the nation toward development, but to bring Korean work styles into line with those of the developed nations of the 'convergence club' (Magariños, 2001).

With impetus from UNEVOC,¹¹ the MOL incorporated 'universal' ideas regarding what makes people employable in particular nations, took ownership of those ideas, and unilaterally instituted 'Knowledge-Economy' preparation VET programmes. The design and utility of such programmes demonstrate the state's strategy to integrate workers—the group that had had the least political participation throughout Korean economic development—into economic development. Workers as represented by unions did not enjoy a political participatory function, but were expected to behave as active, efficient, flexible participants in economic development, and to take increased responsibilities for their own status as employable.

The Vocational Training Promotion Act no. 5474 of December 24 1997 started a trend by changing the titles of VET facilities to *vocational ability development* training facilities. The title 'vocational training' itself was transformed into 'vocational ability development training', and 'vocational training instructors' became 'vocational ability development training instructors'. In paragraph (2) of the same Act, public VET institutes were changed in name to 'public vocational ability development' training facilities, and vocational training to 'vocational ability development training', respectively (MOL, 1999).

'Ability', a relatively ambiguous term used repeatedly in the emerging training institutions, refers to a particular work ethic included as part of training procedures—a new priority towards a less tangible kind of worker power than concrete skills alone.



These rapid changes were externally introduced by UNEVOC experts, but the Korean government has been very good at claiming ownership of such tasks, which were presented as necessary components of ‘workers’ skills development’, designed to help workers to become employable and to maintain their own status of employability.

Workers were expected to assume new responsibilities and skills for the international work standard, *regardless* of previously acquired skills. One author has pointed out potentially problematic areas for an educative scheme of neoliberalisation:

- How to internationalise attitudes within education systems that have traditionally stressed national values and culture.
- How to co-ordinate skills supply and demand in increasingly volatile markets, and with the pressures for political and economic neoliberalisation.
- How to generate the creative and innovative capacity required of future leading economies with education systems traditionally stressing passive learning and social conformism. (Green, 1999: 270)

KRIVET assumed new responsibilities and goals for worker training, taking on these problematic concepts under the direction of the Ministry of Education and the MOL and on 18 October 2000 it was inaugurated as the UNESCO Regional Centre of Excellence in Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Thus KRIVET was transformed into one of the offices of the regional UNEVOC centre for the Asia Pacific region. This occurred as the General Assembly of UNESCO resolved to reinforce technical and vocational education and training via expansion of its international programme. The head office of UNEVOC was established in Bonn, Germany in September 2000, and has regional centres across the globe. In Seoul, UNEVOC has one main and three associate centres, the former located at the KRIVET site and the latter in the buildings of the Ministry of Education, in the office of the Industrial Education Policy Officer and at the Korea Manpower Agency.

On September 18 2000, the Labour Reform Task Force was activated—a group chaired by the vice-minister for Labour, who reminded the nation that ‘labour sector reform is crucial to enhance competitiveness of an enterprise and a

nation and improve living quality of workers in this era of unbridled competition' (MOL, 1999). The following are some of the main points of the task force's objectives:

- *Livelihood protection measure*
 - Innovation in the operation of job security centres and manpower banks
 - The establishment of a three-year plan for Vocational Ability
- *Development*
 - The diversification of labour diplomacy and international exchanges
 - The formulation of measures to expand inter-Korean exchanges
 - Co-operation in the labour sector (MOL, 1999)

The requirements of the task force highlight the importance of labour power and its capabilities in the reform period, and are reflected in government and internally-led strategies for worker education. This process occurred predominantly through government relations with international organisations, and aimed to transform labour in order to meet premeditated behaviour targets. These new relations meant that the government and businesses became more deeply involved in VET programmes than ever before, through dialogue and interaction with the research institute, and through negotiations about the content of skills training itself.

Kevin Cleaver, World Bank director and author of the Bank report released in February 2002, reported that:

Tapping into the Knowledge Economy goes beyond investing in communications and information technologies. It means having the capacity to use knowledge effectively by putting in place the right economic and institutional framework, giving people the skills they need to exploit these opportunities, and funding local innovation centres that guarantee the continuous flow of fresh ideas.¹²

Foreign experts, particularly in newly-merged multinational companies, began to teach the new requirements of work



competence. One example of such a VET strategy was that of the multi-sector conglomerate Samsung, where employees are considered loyal, aggressive and innovative. These strategies emerged before the economic crisis, but have been intensified in this period. 'Samsung has had no strikes. Employees feel that their needs are met ... [Samsung] plans to increase its social responsibility' (Kim, 1996). Many companies began to assign reading matter to employees: 'companies provide a list of required reading and say, "If you don't want to read them, leave"' (ibid). Other companies used such techniques to improve the 'voluntary' participation of employees, with implications for job retention. The leaders in what is known as 'reading management' are Korean Mobile Telecom, Samsung, Hyundai, Sunkyong and E-Land. These companies maintain that it is crucial to follow the guidelines of restructuring in order to meet the demands of a globalising economy; and, using *trasformismo*-laden rhetoric, companies and the government intend to absorb any potentially opposing ideas to the propagation of the accumulation strategies of neoliberalism.

During and after the restructuring period that began in 1997, and following the aforementioned guidelines, the management of these companies introduced the idea of *voluntary* participation in training schemes, albeit with incentives for participation. VET participation provided a rare opportunity to secure employment; a clear case of the government's *trasformismo* strategy. One of the side effects of neoliberal development is the need for a flexible work force.¹³ When the government recommended a form of VET that encourages workers to become 'flexible', it rephrased the concept to incorporate a motivation for 'lifelong learning'. This is a form of *trasformismo*, because despite the articulation of their positive outcomes for workers' self-improvement, nonetheless these 'alternative' VET incentives were steered by the capitalist class's accumulation strategy. This can also be seen in the new incentives that were introduced under the Employment Insurance System, an institution that was designed to reduce the risk of job loss after the Lifetime Employment laws had been revised (KOILAF, 1999b).

Employees were eligible to enjoy the benefits of the System—if, that is, they enrolled voluntarily in the Vocational Competency Development Programme. In order to encourage voluntary participation, the government offered



businesses two forms of support: subsidies for the implementation costs to employers; and paid leave, for employees, for training. In 1997, 13,888 firms were entitled to offer the programme to employees. The support and advocacy of vocational and technical training and education in Korea is the key for the next phase of economic development. This training included new ideological information that would offer skills for competency within the knowledge economy, and train employees to apply new work-styles based on individual performance and 'competence'.

The promotion of these new characteristics of labour performance includes several elements that contrast with previous Korean requirements for employable skills. Rowley and Bae (2002) observe how core ideologies of human resource flows, work systems, evaluation and reward systems and employee influence can be systematically contrasted with the introduction of new requirements. Traditional Korean work practices include the prioritisation of an affiliate organisation over the individual; emphasis on collective equality; and community orientation over individual equity and market principal orientations. The new requirements made of workers became increased job mobility and flexibility, and there was an emphasis on the development of professional, skilled workers. These skills took precedence over more craft-based or manufacturing work skills. However, the 'flexibility' rhetoric affects unskilled workers in more negative ways than it does skilled. While flexibility means lifelong learning and opportunities for previously 'skilled' workers, it means job loss for others.

In the contemporary scenario of forced training programmes, one study produced by KRIVET indicates worker dissatisfaction, and reluctance to attend the programme. *Participation Factor of Training Programmes* (KRIVET, 2000) shows that 47.4 per cent of training attendees participated because it was compulsory, whereas 14.9 per cent attended training programmes voluntarily. This gap indicates that discord remains, despite the government's wish that workers should be 'partners' in development. So workers do not tend to participate in programmes with full compliance or consent, but are expected by the government to comply, as is the case in passive revolution.

What this means for Korea is that membership of the expanding global political economy of neoliberalism



requires more than just entrance into the OECD or the WTO, and democratisation. It not only requires the consolidation of state interests for development, but also requires notable societal transformations that go deeper than the material restructuring funded by the IMF. Without even the likelihood of immediate worker consent, the government has resorted to old leadership methods within the means of passive revolution. So, in Korea, a significant increase in external influences can be noted in terms of the introduction of new ways of work and development, presented using a progressive tone, for citizens'—and thus the nation's—improved status in the global economy of neoliberalism.

4. Analysis and conclusion

As has been shown by a historical analysis of Korean economic development through several passive revolutions, capitalism itself has not fled the terrain but has been re-articulated through a series of incremental changes. Work standards and 'employability' have been re-articulated via elite-authored VET programmes, and conditions for passive revolution have existed at all stages of development. While molecular changes in VET curricula have accommodated the accumulation strategies of governments over time, the overarching appeal of capitalist integration into gradually-emerging international norms has been the motivating force for elite-led, *trasformismo*-driven and, thus, non-hegemonic development.

This analysis of passive revolution in the national context, as influenced by external forces, demonstrates the struggle for realised consensus between states and societies, and indicates the potential for fragmentation of what has become an increasingly internationally-oriented project of capitalist hegemony (Van der Pijl, 1993) in Korea. In fact, in the contemporary context, international pressures are the driving motivation for a particular form of development that is becoming increasingly expansive across nations.

During the period of dictatorship from 1948-1993, presidents expected workers to find comfort in nationalism and work for the benefit of their country, and to meet the standards as such. Even after democratisation there has been little relief in the workplace, as people have been forced to adjust to 'market forces'. Following the 1997 economic crisis,



the Kim government sought international aid for workers' skills improvements and convergence. This is an incremental change that suits the contemporary strategy of accumulation—that of neoliberalism and the creation and ascendance of a knowledge economy in Korea.

A significant critique that might be made on the basis of this analysis is that economic restructuring in Korea privileged white-collar, highly skilled workers, particularly in the era of restructuring for neoliberalism. Privileged workers were able to retain employment, often in companies that merged with multinational corporations.

Despite the newly introduced idea of 'flexibility' of the labour force, 'employable' workers enjoyed continuous work. Less skilled workers have not been permitted a significant voice in development strategy designs, and more highly skilled workers were incorporated into elite-governed objectives via incentives and training opportunities. For less skilled workers, training opportunities were a requirement whose logic or 'incentive' was job retention, and even then, job flexibility presented an ever-present threat.

Groups which are severely underprivileged by development are perhaps most likely to initiate dissent. Because 'economic restructuring is occurring at all levels ... resistance movements cannot defeat it by concentrating on one level alone; capital can always side-step such opposition' (Amoore et al, 2000: 25).

Therefore, resistance may emerge from a widened worker consciousness of oppression. If dissent exists in a form that is a threat to the mechanism of the VET programmes, it could indicate the fragmentation of international hegemony (Arrighi, 1993), which is at the heart of the supposed 'best practices' (Appelbaum & Batt, 1994) needed for a globally competitive labour force for the knowledge economy.

However, if Korea 'owns' the process of restructuring in response to supposedly immutable forces of globalisation and economic development, it will increasingly be required to make choices regarding the treatment of workers. This article has demonstrated that VET is one tool applied by Korean regimes in order to attempt to accommodate workers in the rapid and painful economic transformations. It has argued that VET appears to suit an elite-led programme of development, and that it provides only surface-level concessions to workers in a style very common to *transformo*-led strategies.

Notes

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1. See also Salamon (1997) and 'National and organisational culture and institutions' (Rowley & Bae, 2002).
 2. See also Cammack (2001) and (2002b).
 3. 'It' here refers to practices of development, which Leftwich discusses in the paragraph previous to this quotation. He outlines the argument of development as a discourse of domination (2000: 59-69).
 4. Information about VET in South Korea was gathered during several trips to Seoul, during which I conducted interviews with researchers at KRIVET, and gathered several English-language publications from various locations. 6 Gramsci's view of a hegemonic historical bloc is a 'fusion of material, institutional, inter-subjective, theoretical and ideological capacities' (PN: 366). This historical period is thus composed of an organic link between political and civil society, and it is 'not just an alliance, but a dialectical unity of base and superstructure, or theory and practice, or intellectuals and masses' (Forgacs, 1988). The complete realisation of a historical bloc occurs at such a time that a hegemonic class achieves leadership by way of the universalisation of particular ideas, such as 'best practices' for development.
 6. Giolitti was the Italian prime minister 1892-93, 1906-09, 1911-14, and 1920-21 (PN: 94, n. 68).
 7. See F. Godemont (1999) for an in-depth analysis of the effects of the crisis on the Asia Pacific region.
 8. Between 1995 and 1999, unemployment increased drastically, from a low 2 per cent in 1995 to 8.4 per cent in 1999 (Rowley & Bae, 2002: 534). This percentage increased during the restructuring period of the economic crisis, beginning in late-1997.
 9. Cox discusses how international production divides workers into three broad and hierarchical categories. The first category of workers is *integrated* into the system of

management and research and development; in the terminology of Sklair (1997, 2001a, 2001b) and Van der Pijl (1997, 1998), these workers are members of the transnational capitalist class (TCC). Second, there are those workers in more precarious positions, who are subject to labour flexibility practices and enjoy little job protection. Third are the excluded groups. This final group includes small, low-technology enterprises and the unemployed (Cox, 1999). The two latter groups are completely marginalised from the TCC, and from the Korean government's strategies, in the contemporary context of globalisation.

10. The following describes the type of manpower needed in order to enrich the government's accumulation strategy for neoliberalism: 'Manpower with intelligence, skills, creativity and willingness, and the knowledgeable [sic] are critical for sharpening competitive edge in the era of infinite competition. The inflexible wage system has failed to induce efforts by companies to improve productivity and workers' vocational abilities, thereby weakening Korean companies' competitiveness. It is becoming increasingly important to lay a solid ground for economic recovery through remodelling corporate infrastructure and creating an atmosphere where workers of ability are valued' (KOILAF, 1999: 11).
11. 'UNESCO's International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training was established in September 2000. It is dedicated to developing and improving technical and vocational education and training in UNESCO's Member States. Its focus is on information exchange, networking and international cooperation' (UNEVOC, 2002).
12. The World Bank's Knowledge Economy Forum was held in Paris in February 2002, and included presentations from representatives of Ireland, Finland and South Korea —all countries which have 'leap-frogged the development process through smart acquisition and use of knowledge'; World Bank (2002) *A Preliminary Strategy to Develop a Knowledge Economy in European Union Accession Countries*, prepared for the Knowledge Economy Forum (Paris, 20-22 February 2002), organised in co-ordination with the European Commission (EC) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

13. The following recommendations for economic development are representative of neoliberal ideology:
1. Fiscal discipline.
 2. A redirection of public expenditure priorities toward fields offering both high economic returns and the potential to improve income distribution, such as primary healthcare, primary education, and infrastructure.
 3. Tax reform (to lower marginal rates and broaden the tax base).
 4. Interest rate liberalisation.
 5. A competitive exchange rate.
 6. Trade liberalisation.
 7. Liberalisation of FDI inflows.
 8. Privatisation.
 9. Deregulation (in the sense of abolishing barriers to entry and exit).
 10. Secure property rights (Williamson, 1990).

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